

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 165857
ORIGIN SS-25

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DRAFTED BY EA/VLC:JRJOHNSON:JY
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EA/VLC:FZBROWN
H:ASWIFT (DRAFT)
L:PNORTON (DRAFT)
EA/RA:MEILAND

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
INFO CINCPAC
SECDEF

S E C R E T STATE 165857

EXDIS, SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PROP, MOPS, LA, US

SUBJECT: EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL IN LAOS

REF: VIENTIANE 955

1. DEPARTMENT APPRECIATES RECEIVING EMBASSY'S VIEWS (REFTEL) ON QUESTION OF OFFERING LAO ASSISTANCE IN EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL (EOD). WE RECOGNIZE POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES IN TERMS OF IMPROVING FRAGILE BILATERAL RELATIONS WHICH MIGHT ACCRUE FROM OFFER OF ASSISTANCE IN THIS FIELD. AS NOTED BELOW, HOWEVER, CURRENT LEGAL RESTRICTIONS AND LIKELY CONGRESSIONAL OPPOSITION TO ANY CHANGES IN THESE RESTRICTIONS WOULD MAKE SUCH AN OFFER VERY DIFFICULT.

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2. DOD HAS CONSIDERED TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF QUESTION. BASED ON EXTENSIVE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE, DOD EXPERTS STATE THAT IT WOULD NOT BE TECHNICALLY FEASIBLE TO USE TRACTOR-DRAWN PLOWS TO UNCOVER ORDNANCE FOR DEFUSING, SINCE EXPLOSION ON CONTACT IS MOST LIKELY RESULT IN ANY SUCH OPERATION. WHILE SMALL MINES AND BOOBY TRAPS WERE CLEARED

FROM RELATIVELY LIMITED AREAS IN VIETNAM IN A SIMILAR MANNER, PRESENCE OF NUMEROUS LARGE UNEXPLODED BOMBS WOULD MAKE USE OF THIS TECHNIQUE OVER WIDESPREAD AREAS IN LAOS DANGEROUS AND UNREALISTIC IN TERMS OF LOSSES TO PERSONNEL AND MACHINERY.

3. WE BELIEVE THAT ONLY PRACTICAL ASSISTANCE USG MIGHT OFFER WOULD BE TO PROVIDE TECHNICIANS FOR THOROUGH "HANDS ON" TRAINING OF LAO TECHNICIANS, EITHER ON SITE OR IN U.S. THIS WOULD INVOLVE CONVENTIONAL EOD TECHNIQUES USING LOCATOR EQUIPMENT AND DISPOSAL THROUGH DEFUSING OR REMOTE DETONATION AS REQUIRED.

4. AS TO LEGAL ASPECT OF QUESTION, MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE ARE PRESENTLY FORBIDDEN BY STATUTE FOR LAOS. IT WOULD THEREFORE APPEAR THAT WE WOULD NEED SPECIFIC NEW LEGISLATIVE AUTHORIZATION TO OFFER LAO ASSISTANCE IN EOD. SUCH A PROGRAM COULD BE DIFFICULT IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO SELL TO CONGRESS AT THIS POINT, ESPECIALLY IF IT INVOLVED POSSIBLE U.S. CASUALITIES.

5. DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND DEFENSE AGREE THAT IT WOULD BE WISE TO WAIT TO SEE HOW CONGRESS VOTES ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION RESTRICTING AID TO LAOS BEFORE DECIDING WHETHER TO SOUND OUT CONGRESS (EVEN INFORMALLY). WE WOULD EXPECT TO HAVE A BETTER IDEA OF LEGAL RESTRAINTS AND CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES AND POSSIBILITIES OPEN TO US BY
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SEPTEMBER. UNTIL THEN, DEPARTMENT PROPOSES NO FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF PROJECT. VANCE

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